

Communications

To the Editor of the *Journal of Sport History*:

As Professor William J. Baker pointed out clearly in the Spring, 1983 issue of *The Journal of Sport History* (Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 55), medieval sport history is still waiting for its H. A. Harris. A few minor studies have appeared and few brief chapters in texts have helped our understanding but, for the most part, we are not building a straw house when we say there is a dearth of studies on medieval sport.

Yet, with the necessity of enlightenment staring us in the face, we must remember that there are numerous obstacles to overcome for the student of medieval sport. First of all, one must be interested in the history of sport. Needless to say, famed medievalists like Carl Stephenson and Joseph Strayer could have enlightened us about the history of medieval sport, but that subject was not their chosen realm. The person who writes the definitive work on medieval sport will have a feel for sport. Second, one must ask "Where does one begin?" Does the writer concentrate solely on the later Middle Ages where the documentary evidence is greater? Does the writer exclude Byzantium and Islam? Third, a major question for the writer of a history of medieval sport is, "What is needed for a full study of medieval sport?" The writer must be a trained medievalist if the finished work is to have an impact on medieval scholarship as well as on sport history scholarship. The writer must know the Middle Ages well. The writer must be a linguist. If the volume includes Byzantium and Islam, the writer must know Arabic and Greek as well as Latin, French, Spanish, and German. Frankly, these languages constitute a minimum.

The scholar who writes the definitive work on medieval sport must know the fictional literature as well as the public records. What can be gleaned from such works as Andreas Capellanus' *The Art of Courtly Love* or Jean de Meun and Guillaume de Lorris' *Romance of the Rose* or the scads of other literary selections should be used to illustrate and enrich. Knowing how and when to use *Beowulf* is very important but certainly no more so than the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, the voluminous collection of chronicles, sermons, charters, and other valuable documents.

The definitive work on medieval sport must include ecclesiastical contributions to sport history as well as secular ones. Saints' lives, rules for monastic orders, monastic charters, papal letters and directives form but a part of the rich source material.

In lieu of that definitive work which will surely come, edited volumes of seminal articles, thought-provoking articles, and monographs which touch upon medieval sport can serve as the building blocks of a fuller understanding

of sport in medieval society. These same blocks, when placed in just the right place by the master builder, become the house of medieval sport. Until then, all of us interested in the subject can draw our blueprints and take a course in masonry.

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Editorial Note: Letters to the editor are published verbatim